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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 003631

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IRAN: ITALY SENDS TOUGH MESSAGE

REF: STATE 199225

Classified By: Pol M/C David Pearce for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Berlusconi publicly condemned the statements made by Iranian President Ahmadinejad. The MFA also immediately phoned the Iranian Ambassador in Rome to protest upon hearing Ahmadinejad's remarks, following up with a short public statement on its web site. The Mayor of Rome called the Iranian President's statements an insult to civilization. Initial press reaction was notably absent, though Ahmadinejad's remarks made headlines two days later. End summary.

2. (C) PM Berlusconi, at a press conference concluding the special EU Summit in Hampton Court on October 27, called Ahmadinejad's statements "unacceptable," adding that they confirm the international community's concern over Tehran's nuclear agenda. The MFA reacted immediately to Ahmadinejad's statements by having Director General for the Middle East Riccardo Sessa (NEA A/S Welch equivalent) phone the Iranian Ambassador in Rome to protest. On October 27 the MFA posted a short statement on its web site but did not identify at what level the call had been made and qualified its initial condemnation by saying "if correctly reported" (text provided in para. 6 below). Pol MC followed up with Sessa's Deputy, Luca del Balzo, to assure him that Ahmadinejad had indeed made the statements and to stress the importance of official, public condemnation of those statements. Noting that the new Italian Ambassador to Washington Castellaneta was scheduled to meet with Secretary Rice later that day, Pol MC said he wanted to make sure that Washington had a full picture of Italy's reaction. Del Balzo said that the MFA's condemnation had been issued immediately, picked up by the news agencies, and that Italy was informing its EU partners of its condemnation as well.

4. (C) Pol MC followed up with two of PM Berlusconi's Diplomatic Advisors, Francesco Talo and Marco Carnelos. Talo told Pol MC that Italy was "concerned and stupefied" by the remarks. He apparently then informed Carnelos, who was traveling with Berlusconi for the EU Summit in the UK, of our concerns, as Carnelos later called Pol MC to say that he would check with his UK colleagues to see if FM Straw would make a statement on behalf of the EU. Talo later told us the issue was raised with PM Berlusconi, who then issued the condemnation cited above.

5. (C) Comment. The high-level and public condemnation by Iran's largest EU trading partner is significant. Despite its important trade relationship, the Government of Italy recognizes the egregious nature of Ahmadinejad's statements and spoke out in an unusually high-level and powerful way. End comment.

6. (U) Begin text of October 27 MFA statement. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs firmly condemns the statements made by Iranian President Ahmadinejad against the State of Israel (should they have been correctly reported), and has expressed perturbation and concern to the Iranian Ambassador in Rome. It also emphasized to the diplomatic representative that the tenor of such unacceptable affirmations fortifies concerns as regards the policies being pursued by the new Iranian leadership, in particular as far as the nuclear dossier is concerned. End text.

7. (U) Begin text of statement by Rome Mayor Walter Veltroni. The Iranian President's very serious statements against Israel are an intolerable insult not only to the State of Israel, but to the entire international community. Whoever, in whatever part of the world, believes in the values of civilization, community living, and peace cannot but feel offended and worried with the fact that statements that are so intolerant and violent come from a man who has very high political responsibilities and who leads a country that already causes concern because of its nuclear energy policies. It is also all the more serious that those statements followed by one day a new and bloody terrorist attack that -- for the umpteenth time -- caused innocent victims in Israel, while alarming displays of anti-Semitism grow in several countries. At this moment in time and in the name of a city that prides itself on representing the values of civilization and of dialogue among nations, a city that hosted on several occasions meetings for peace in the Middle East, I express the fullest and most affectionate solidarity to the representatives of Israel and to the Jewish community.

End text.

SPOGLI